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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an understanding of feminist teaching through a poststructural perspective which problematizes knowledge construction and meaning, in particular how feminist teachers create spaces for and struggle within the relationship of negotiating knowledge and knowing in higher education classrooms. The paper uses the term "negotiation" to characterize the constant redefinition of knowledge in all of its forms as it is developed through tensions between and contributions of class content, students, teachers, and larger societal factors. The paper first explains its focus on teachers in this capacity and then briefly presents ideas about knowledge from literature on feminist classrooms. The paper then addresses knowledge as conceptualized in poststructural philosophy. Finally the paper presents data from interviews with persons who use feminist teaching in some capacity to talk about knowledge negotiations that occur within their higher education classrooms. The paper aims to provide many viewpoints on the types of knowledge that are validated in classrooms, to show how these teachers conceptualized both their roles and those of students as they all engage as participants in the classroom and knowledge negotiation process, and to demonstrate the degree to which these teachers problematized the existence of truth within their classrooms and the larger society. (Contains 22 references.) (JB)

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Negotiating knowledge and knowing:

Philosophies of teaching and learning in feminist classrooms

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Feminist teaching is a term that is perhaps best understood as a conglomeration of teaching philosophies and strategies, each consisting of some idea of how feminist theory and educational theory can relate to and enrich each other. Just as there are many feminisms, so are there many conceptualizations of feminist teaching.

While some authors presenting the way that they have utilized feminist teaching stress that their experiences are entirely unique and should not be considered "the" feminist pedagogy that all others should employ (Lewis, 1990), other educational, feminist and poststructural theorists call for an increased focus on the teachers in these classrooms and the strategies that they use in the name of feminist pedagogy (Brown, 1992; Gore, 1993; Orner, 1992; Rorty, 1990). These authors problematize and question the existence of a clear and understandable theory about the goals, processes, and effectiveness of feminist pedagogy in higher education classrooms.

In an attempt to contribute to the discourse in this area, I examined one specific relationship that occurs in different ways and to varying degrees in nearly all classrooms. This relationship transpires when teachers and students come together with the intention of talking about, producing and negotiating knowledge. In this work, I present my understandings of feminist teaching through a fairly focused lens. In short, I look at this process through a poststructural perspective which problematizes knowledge construction and meaning.

In this paper, I discuss my learnings of how feminist teachers create spaces for and struggle within this relationship of negotiating knowledge and knowing in higher education classrooms. I use the term negotiation to characterize the constant redefinitions of knowledge in all of its forms as it is developed through tensions between and contributions of class content, students, teachers and larger societal factors. I first explain my focus on teachers in this capacity

and then briefly present ideas about knowledge from literature on feminist classrooms. I then talk about knowledge as conceptualized in poststructural philosophy. Finally, I use data from interviews with persons who use feminist teaching in some capacity to talk about knowledge negotiations that occur within the higher education classrooms of which they are a part.

Focus on teaching role

Calls for empowerment, the examination of relationships between students and teachers, and the emphasis on action in feminist classrooms have all been considered in feminist literature as interrelated parts of feminist pedagogies. And yet while emphasizing the interconnectedness of innumerable environmental factors and circumstances that contribute to and influence a given educational experience, several authors have raised questions about the problematic role that teachers play in "feminist" educational environments (Bright, 1987; Gore, 1990; Gore 1993; Lather, 1991; Orner, 1992). When considering feminist teaching, who is to hold the authority and power in the classroom? Who is to be in control of the content of classroom discussions? Is viewing students as passive learners or even "allowing" them to choose such a role in line with feminist thinking about teaching and learning? Ellsworth (1989) questioned further,

> Although the literature recognizes that teachers have much to learn from their students' experiences, it does not address the ways in which there are things that I as a professor could *never know* about the experiences, oppressions, and understandings of other participants in the class. This situation makes it impossible for any single voice in the classroom--including that of the professor--to assume the position of center or origin of knowledge or authority, of having privileged access to authentic experience or appropriate language. (p. 101)

Gore (1990) asked for "contextualized guidance" for teachers engaging in critical and feminist pedagogies (p. 68).

Perhaps most persuasively, Orner (1992) called for an examination of those who are "in control" of feminist classrooms. In her words,

> In education, the call for voice has most often been directed at students. Where are the multiple, contradictory voices of teachers, writers, researchers and administrators? The time has come to listen to those who have been asking others to speak. (p. 88)

In this study, I hope to contribute a variety of perspectives on feminist teaching from one group of those who are currently engaged in the process--feminist teachers in institutions of higher education.

Views of knowledge in feminist teaching

Higher education is often seen as the pursuit of truth and knowledge. Yet, those engaged in that "pursuit," as well as the products of those engagements, are often criticized. While feminist criticisms of the academy take a variety of forms (see Gore, 1993; Maher 1987; Robinson, 1973, for example), the focus of feminist educators concerning knowledge generally remains on one of two themes, both concerning the exclusivity of representation that is traditionally accepted as academic knowledge.

Partiality of knowledge

Feminist involvement in education generally, and feminist teaching in particular, arose in part from an increasing awareness that the "knowledges" being dispersed, created or discussed in academic environments were partial, incomplete and biased (Gore, 1993; Howe, 1977; Luke and Gore, 1992; Maher 1987; Robinson, 1973). In fact, Boxer (1985) stated,

> The most significant contribution of the new feminism of the 1960s and 1970s to the education of women lay in its perception that sexism in the curriculum--in textbooks ('the pioneer and his wife moved west'), course outlines (only male writers included in 'Twentieth-century American Fiction'), and bodies of knowledge (generalizations about human experience based exclusively on male subjects)--made 'coeducation' a myth. (p. 6)

Feminist teaching, perhaps seen earliest in Women's Studies classrooms, attempted to disrupt this traditional understanding of knowledge by breaking down error, rebuilding knowledge and transforming teaching in higher education classrooms (Boxer, 1985).

In further discussions, feminist scholars suggested that knowledge can never be "objective" because it is conceived of and presented in specific historical and cultural contexts (Boxer, 1985). As Makosky and Paludi (1990) expressed, "The reality is that beliefs and values are such an integral part of the self that they are indistinguishable from absolute truth or fact" (p. 3). It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to break a "truth" or a "fact" away from the context in which it was produced and expressed. The belief that objectivity in academic knowledge was unattainable (and, for some, undesirable) led to an education that sought other sources and means for creating knowledge.

Validating experience

One outcome of the breakdown of objectivity and truth-seeking as primary goals in higher education in feminist thought is the acceptance and validation of personal and experiential sources of knowledge and understanding as alternative ways of knowing and understanding. In feminist classrooms, teachers refrain from demanding that students defer to and shape their own experiences to fit preconstructed, objective knowledge bases (Bennett, 1991; Fagan, 1991). Instead, "the construction of the feminist classroom engages rather than dismisses students' experiences as a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning" (Giroux, 1989, p. 7). Lewis (1990) articulated this shift of knowledge validation in the following way, "The challenge of feminist teaching is in finding ways to make speakable and legitimate the personal/political *investments* we all make in the meanings we ascribe to our historically contingent experiences" (p. 186). Those

experiences are then transformed or translated into speakable, invested knowledge that is created, discussed and validated within feminist classrooms.

Philosophical framework

While scholars and educators have taken a variety of perspectives on a wide span of theories and pedagogical styles, the labelling of paradigm(s) as poststructural is a relatively recent phenomena in much educational literature (Capper, 1993). I chose to approach this research from a feminist poststructural point of view as I find that it is useful in examining the contradictory and complex positions of teachers who are engaging with/in feminist teaching. Both feminism and poststructuralism have implications for the literature I have chosen to review, for the people I chose to interview, for my chosen methodology, and, to be sure, for the understandings that I have formed through this research.

What does poststructuralism have to offer this analysis?

Definitions and uses of poststructuralism as a philosophical framework may be slightly or radically different depending on the person who is articulating its meaning and the situation in which it is being applied. In fact, Ross (1988) stated,

> That it has achieved such diverse cultural currency as a term thereby demonstrates what has been seen as one of postmodernism's most provocative lessons; that terms are by no means guaranteed their meanings, and that these meanings can be appropriated and redefined for different purposes, different contexts, and, more important, different causes. (p. xi)

By claiming the constant shifting of meaning depending on historical and cultural situations and consequences, poststructuralism also necessarily problematizes the consistency and stability of its own meaning. Ross asserted further,

> Everything is contestable; nothing is off-limits; and no outcomes are guaranteed. These are the conditions of a 'philosophy of praxis,' which demands of its disciples that they put aside, for the time being, the rank-and-file state of mind--in other words, their willing suspension of disbelief in a fixed ethical horizon. (p. xv)

Poststructuralism recognizes and seeks to address the implications and interests that are constantly present in its always situational meaning.

There are many themes in poststructuralism, often centering around conceptions of power, difference, language and knowledge. In poststructuralist thought, none of these themes can be completely understood without simultaneously examining how it relates to the others. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus most directly on knowledge and meaning as predominant areas of exploration in poststructuralism. When appropriate, I will draw briefly from other themes as well.

Knowledge and meaning

A central tenet of poststructuralism involves conceptualizing knowledge and inscribing meaning. Several authors have considered the relationships between power and knowledge to be critical in poststructural thought (Gore, 1993; Middleton, 1993). Knowledge in poststructuralism is viewed as always partial and political; power relations are, while not synonymous with knowledge, "directly implied" by it (Gore, 1993). The knowledge that is viewed as complete and true in a given societal context varies over time; and those whose knowledge is most highly regarded in any such context are often equated as being those with the greatest power. In this line of thought, Luke and Gore (1992) suggested,

> Central to poststructuralism and postmodernism is an anti-foundational epistemology. This epistemology rejects foundational truths located in disciplinary knowledges and rejects the unitary rationalist subject as foundational to all knowledge. The poststructural agenda focuses on the deconstruction of taken-for-granted historical structures of socio-cultural organizations within which various versions of the 'individual' have been inserted and, importantly, on the language and theoretical structures with which the individual and the social have been written. (p. 5)

Legitimized knowledge in poststructuralism, then, changes depending on the context and the power relations at play in a given context. Additionally, discourses that support legitimized knowledge are able to be articulated and deconstructed.

Conceptualizing meaning as inscribed on given entities, rather than objectively described about them, is another aspect of knowledge that is a central concept in poststructuralist thought. Meaning and truth as we currently understand it and as we will construct it in the future is and will always be flexible and partial (Ross, 1988; Weedon, 1987), as well as constantly shaped by the historical and societal contexts in which we are situated (Lather, 1991). In Foucault's words (cited in Gore, 1993): " 'Truth' is linked in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (p. 55). Meaning is shifting and determined always by the social, historical and political forces that are, in a specific situation, acting upon it.

While poststructuralism doesn't attempt to negate the possibility of reality, it attempts to illuminate how our perceptions of that reality are constantly grounded in the shifting social systems in which we are operating. As Lather (1991) expressed, "Rather than dismissing 'the real,' postmodernism foregrounds how discourses shape our experience of 'the real' in its proposal that the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society" (p. 25). In poststructuralism, the ideological processes and power relations which shape the meanings we

ascribe to the world around us (as well as to ourselves) are "precarious, contradictory and in process" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33). Poststructuralism suggests that any attempts we make to establish objective truths and timeless realities will be at best, partial, and at worst, dangerous.

These thoughts lead me to ask, in a particular situation or discourse, at a particular time, what knowledge is most readily validated? Who or what are the structures that are in positions of validation? What are the resistances to existing knowledges? What are the resulting relationships? What are the competing knowledge sources? How are they validated? How are they enacted? What are the power relations that enable a certain knowledge to be accepted and validated within a given discourse?

Research method

I bring many preconceived understandings to this work, as anyone who took part in extensive educational experiences and in our larger society presumably would. Orner (1992) suggested that in "making sense" of our relations to others,

> There is always the possibility (and actuality) of a gap, of misinterpretation, of misrecognition when we try to make sense of our relation to others. We can never be certain of the meaning of others' responses. We can never be certain of the meaning of our own responses. (p. 84)

Therefore, I wish to express my views on feminist education in an effort to provide a context for the understandings that I have generated in this work.

I believe that education as it currently stands is a powerful tool for producing and reproducing culture, for guaranteeing exposure to "appropriate" concepts and behaviors and, in some cases, for ensuring indoctrination. I believe that we are all variously instruments and products acting and reacting within those parameters. In this sense, feminist teaching, when

located in institutions of higher education, is dangerously close to forces which ensure that we all remain within those limits of functioning. In some cases, then, what is claimed to be feminist teaching can serve to be no more than traditional education with a content that is perhaps more recently developed.

However, I also believe that feminist teaching may offer something beyond mere exposure to key concepts and beyond just the reproduction of dominant culture. The combining of feminism and education has the potential to be subversive--encouraging not just "exposure" to concepts, but participation in meaningful experience. This combination can encourage awareness that a dominant culture exists while pushing for an understanding of the subcultures that resist and support it. Feminist education has the potential to foster a hope that it is possible to create new cultures and new futures.

The data for this paper represent part of a larger research endeavor in which I received feedback from several students, conducted a document analysis of syllabi and other materials, and acted as a participant observer in several classes. The data for this work, however, were taken exclusively from interviews with those who identify or were identified by their peers both as feminists and educators.[1] Additionally, the majority of these professors were associated in some way with the Women's Studies Program or with the School of Education. Through a nomination process, I generated a list of names of potential interviewees, 22 of whom I have subsequently

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[1] For various reasons, not all of those interviewed would claim the label 'feminist teacher' as one that accurately or exclusively described their strategies and philosophies of teaching and learning. These persons, however, were seen by their peers as utilizing feminist teaching, described themselves as feminists, and are currently assuming teaching responsibilities in the institution. While I acknowledge that this labelling is potentially problematic, I use it nevertheless to describe a certain group of those who have existed within this specific intersection of feminism and higher education.

interviewed. These interviews, which lasted from 50-90 minutes each, focused generally on philosophies, strategies and complexities involved in teaching and learning situations in which the professor or instructor had participated as a teacher.

The data in this paper represent my understandings of the perspectives of the teachers with whom I spoke. Therefore, they are neither "complete" in some sense, nor would all teachers necessarily agree with my interpretation. Additionally, there are many factors influencing individual teacher's responses which I did not include in this work. Factors such as class size, research and service responsibilities, class content areas, disciplines, student interest and commitment, and many others undoubtedly influenced the comments that teachers made in the interviews. For the purposes of this paper, I generally do not delineate between or specify teachers' specific situations. Therefore, my comments throughout this paper are more or less applicable depending on situational factors and teachers' personal philosophical beliefs. I plan to further examine these influences in later analyses.

Framing the data

For the rest of this work, I will present data as described above to support my understandings of these feminist teachers' views on negotiating knowledge within their classrooms. The four areas on which I chose to focus are perspectives on knowledge negotiation, what is considered valid academic knowledge, negotiations between students and knowledge, and negotiations between teachers and knowledge. The categorical placement of data and thoughts into these sections is somewhat arbitrary in that there is often overlap between ideas in one section and their counterparts in others. This overlap is inevitable, I believe, because the negotiations that took place in these classrooms, both in terms of knowledge and in nearly every

other way, were not static or categorical themselves; nor were the teachers' viewpoints static or consistent across the group. The resulting richness of this data, therefore, can not be fully captured in categories which are deemed separate and impartial. I therefore urge the reader to consider overlaps and contradictions within this text.

Perspectives on knowledge negotiation

In this section of the paper, I present my understandings about how these teachers conceptualized the construction and negotiation of knowledge in their classrooms. I describe how many have expanded the traditional notions of "appropriate" venues for relating to and working with knowledge in classrooms. The areas on which I chose to focus are: constructing knowledge, posing questions, and learning content and beyond.

Constructing knowledge

The notion of students and teachers constructing knowledge together in a classroom is one with which these teachers were familiar. However, they had varying views on the degree to which this actually happens. While the majority of teachers believed that there was some degree of 'co-construction' going on in their classrooms, they also maintained that there were simultaneously many individuals who were not involved in that construction or who did not come to the same conclusions as the rest of the class. One teacher put it this way,

> The knowledge that is constructed in my classroom is not unified. I would never say that my students and I constructed knowledge that everyone agrees with-- because that's impossible. Not even that many students talk. So I do think that I construct certain ways of thinking and then the students can engage with them if they want to or not...I don't think that somehow we all constructed it together and they were all believing it. But I think it became a knowledge that was put out there.

She stated further,

> I would say in my class, we never construct a group knowledge. I mean, I do think that I've been in groups where the majority of people buy into like similar knowledges and talk about it in the same way and there becomes like a lingo for how to talk and stuff. But even still, there's people who don't talk, who don't buy it in the same kind of way. Or people who interact with it differently just because they're so different.

Often teachers asserted that coming to a class consensus through knowledge construction was perhaps not a worthwhile goal. They hoped rather to engage rigorously with questions and challenges to preconceived ideas and class content.

On an individual student level, teachers considered knowledge production somewhat differently. They encouraged a continual re-evaluation of thoughts and ideas that came up both in class and in outside assignments. They stressed the importance of examining their own viewpoints as they constructed ideas. One teacher explained how this works through an assignment where students are asked to write in journals, and then go back later and write further responding to one's own words. The teacher also responds to these works. She explained how this occurs in her classroom.

> So there's this kind of triple dialogue going on--many more layers than that. There's the classroom experiences--there's the readings--there's my writing back. And then there's the voice of the student writing about all of that. So that they begin to see for the first time that it's possible for them to see themselves as building and understanding a particular set of values and then looking at a higher issue or question.

Another teacher emphasized the need for student examination of their own frameworks as being important for participation in classroom knowledge negotiations. In her words,

> Nothing is a given natural--the system of quality is something that is available for our interrogation. I think that we are able to examine the constructedness of it. And that then in terms of how we actually look at our work, the effort to always make, make more explicit the framework within which the things we are saying emerge.

These teachers saw knowledge construction as being furthered in their classrooms both through re-examination on an individual level and the tensions of constructing knowledge on a group level.

Posing questions

Many teachers stressed the goal of knowledge construction in their classes as being framed by posing questions, rather than finding answers. Questioning content, each other, and themselves formed the basis for classes. One teacher, when asked what her goal is in her teaching, responded in this way, "Well, it's to open up all the possibilities, I guess, of how one might understand what we've read. I'm not looking for the right answers....So I guess it's to offer multiple positions." Another teacher stressed that questioning was one of the primary goals for her course.

> A whole lot of what we're trying to do is help students learn to question everything. But there are also (in this area) some things...that really are right or wrong. So it's a real mixture. On a typical exam, I try to validate both kinds--what I call the social, economic, political analysis. Which to a large extent often ends up being questions that don't have a right or wrong answer. So it's much more, has the person clearly thought about this? As opposed to, is this sort of thinking right?

Finally, one teacher asserted that feminist pedagogy, as she understands it, leads always to another set of questions about given situations. She said,

> I don't think that this is the kind of pedagogy that leads to a preconceived answer--men are bad, women are good. Men are oppressors, women are always victims. But it leads to questions about why, in a certain historical situation, things have worked out this way. It raises another series of questions.

These teachers emphasized that answers were not as much their goal as was a thorough examination through questioning of content and situational events.

Learning content and beyond

Class content was very important to this group of teachers. They stressed that their various content areas were to remain the focus of class sessions and assignments. One teacher explained her focus on content.

> If you set up your class right, you're saying here is some knowledge about people's perspectives or historical material or interdisciplinary work that you have to know. So you're grading on how well they know it. If you set up the class right...But let's say that I'm teaching a...class. And I announce to the class that I'm going to teach feminist interpretation. Then the students are being graded on how well they've learned feminist interpretation.

Another teacher added,

> And then there are in (this) class, things that are considered facts. And even though we might analyze who defines what the facts are, ... in some ways that needs to be learned as a step toward empowerment. ...So there's some real information there that has to be respected even though we might also be critical about how it's been developed.

Content was available for questioning and debate. As such, it was to remain central to class activities.

With this attention to content, these teachers struggled to include a variety of perspectives on their given content areas. They attempted to espouse a more expansive approach to education, one which took into account a variety of potential purposes.

> I think that education takes place on many levels, for one thing, and that it is just as important to pay attention to the emotional and spiritual and physical as it is to pay attention to the intellectual--and I would like to think with my students that I do pay attention to all of these things....You can still create ... a kind of atmosphere in which you as teacher, you reach beyond simply giving them something intellectual and express your own humanity and help them to express theirs in ways that are not written in the textbooks.

The purposes of knowledge production in these classrooms was to engage earnestly with the content of the course, but also to attempt to see beyond the traditionally understood intellect, both in themselves and others, through that education.

"Valid" academic knowledge

Academic knowledge has come to mean many different things in the current educational milieu. In this section, I discuss the types of knowledge that are valued and validated in these feminist classrooms. I also describe how those attempts at validation are located within an academic and social context which designates certain discourses as more appropriate or valuable than others. The areas on which I chose to focus are: acknowledgement of complexity, relevancy to students, student experience, and tentative knowledge and quality.

Acknowledging complexity

Key to the knowledges that were validated and accepted in these classrooms was the acknowledgement that both class content and student lives included various complexities which rendered them "slippery" for participation in knowledge negotiation in the class. One teacher talked about the constant tensions that she felt as she tried to operate within those complexities.

> I know that they want me to give them answers. I know that they want me to tell them what to do and to a certain extent I do because of the logistics of the 16 weeks and I know they've got deadlines to meet. If they can't figure out their deadlines, then I've actually disempowered them. If I make everything too slippery and too negotiable, it actually makes life much more difficult for them--to juggle complex schedules. So I try to be aware of the conditions of their lives that really makes it hard for them to be flexible. And yet I want them to take some control, as much as possible, over the ideas that are important to them, issues...that they want to share. And it's hard. It's a constant struggle.

She stated further that this acknowledgement of complexity enters into class discussions and interactions as well.

> They're not easy discussions to have and yet my view and what I'm trying to teach them through these discussions is that it's important to...find ways through the literature or whatever form to help themselves...understand that we have complex lives. We have complex selves that can get described in stories that kind of help us see that this pathway--this pre-set pathway really isn't who we are at all.

Discussion of this complexity of class content and of students' lives often entered the conversations I had with teachers.

Increasing relevancy to students

A further theme in these interviews was that valid classroom knowledge and knowledge negotiation processes needed to be relevant to students. Though several teachers conceptualized this relevancy in different ways, many acknowledged it as key in the educational experiences they were trying to create. One teacher explained it in this way,

> I want them to sort of talk about it..., (but) what they're getting out of it is about them. It's not really about me. I can have a thousand whistles, tons of lights, show them videos totally engaging but they have to choose what they are going to learn. They have to want it. They have to desire to talk about it...so I have them talk to their neighbors and sometimes you know I know that 20, 30, 40, maybe half the class is talking about what they did last night. But it doesn't matter to me. Because the ones that really want to talk about it, they will and then the other ones at least that they'll be getting a break from having to pay attention. You know they can talk about themselves which is what they really want to, so they can.

Another teacher expressed similar sentiments about the desirability of relevancy of classroom knowledge to students' own lived experiences.

> Everybody has to relate to the material in the way that she or he can, and if she or he can relate to it on a personal level so much better--if it reminds her of her grandmother's experience, then that's fine. That brings this into her world. Piaget says that the way infants acquire knowledge is to hook on to things that are just a little bit different from what's already in their head. If the new knowledge is too different, you just can't get a hold of it-- there's no hook. You've got to be a little bit familiar so that people can relate to it, and then they can hook that on and hook on the next bit of information. They travel the distance slowly by little steps rather than by great big leaps....I think that's a wonderful response....And so I'm pleased when that happens.

Finally, another teacher said that she hopes students learn something on a social dimension that is relevant to their own lives. When asked whether she thought students in her classes learned something from class interactions as well as from class content, she said,

> Yeah, I would hope that they could because that's part of the whole value of using people's social interactions to help them develop their own ideas. And doing that is really hard. Because there's not only this content that needs to be worked on , but there's also this social dimension that I'm trying to teach on. And the other thing that turns up is that although the content changes every semester, it stays more the same than the social dimension does because students change and their needs change over time.

This attention to relevancy of class material to students' lives often meant that these teachers were revising their teaching strategies and intended classroom content as they struggled to find a "good fit" between students and a predetermined knowledge base.

Encouraging student experience

Closely related to the relevancy of knowledge to students, several teachers talked about their validation of student experience as acceptable within their classrooms. As related to their own ideologies and their own lived experiences, students were encouraged to bring parts of themselves to the classroom as they related to the content of the course. One teacher talked about how she saw this in the knowledge negotiation process.

> When someone says something of a personal nature, you have to back off a little bit and let them be whoever they are. It's no longer a subject for the lecture-discussion platform. You have to respect that. And I think that's feminist teaching because it is teaching to the whole person. I didn't say, 'Well, I don't care about your personal experiences, here's the collection of facts and perspectives that I want you to absorb and we'll talk about it.....' Instead it's 'Oh, so that's your perspective. OK, that's why you could be especially interested in this because you have got a personal stake in understanding this and then explaining it to me what your perspective is and to the rest of the class.' And most of the time when someone brings up something personal, it has not been totally irrelevant. It has been, in part, to explain why they've got an opinion that they have.

This teacher, although it was against her formal training, saw personal experience as one way to engage with the material.

Viewing knowledge and quality tentatively

Perhaps the most overarching theme in terms of types of valid knowledge was that which problematized the notion that there was a stable truth or unchanging quality of knowledge or work within their classrooms or in the larger society. Many teachers commented on their efforts to relay this perspective to students, despite resistances to such a concept. One teacher put it this way,

> They can understand that there's these knowledges out there that are like, floating around in the classroom. Socially constructed. We're all socially constructed, whether they really believe that or not, that's what I say. That's how I talk about it in the class. That's what some of the other students talk about. But whether each student really believes that or even, I mean, I don't even want to say that they all know what that means. They don't.... There are multiple knowledges out there that sometimes I access, sometimes the students access and use to like talk about it. But we don't all believe them all in the same way.

Another teacher expressed her views,

> I try really hard to make them realize that most answers come out of a context and questions are generated in a context. And that there isn't a generalizability theory that you can use to set things up so that in all situations... Doing that without making them feel like they become totally relativist. Particularly for those who are currently teaching. I have to stir the pot gently to get them to question themselves without...feeling paralyzed.

Still another teacher commented on her students' struggles to understand or contemplate the idea that truth is partial and flexible.

> Sometimes students will ask me like "truth" questions....They really want some truth. They want me to tell them something. And you know, I don't, and that totally pisses them off and that's really hard for them. I think that has a lot to do with what kind of developmental stage that they might be at or how they see the world working in their lives. I mean, this class has been disrupting everything right and left.

Finally, another teacher talked about the burden that this places on her as she attempts to function in a way which acknowledges ambiguous information and the complexity of asserting truths when her students are not operating within that framework.

> You say things to students and they take it as the truth no matter how much you talk about social constructionism. And we don't talk about facts anymore, and that kind of stuff. But they still accept it as facts and truth. So that places a heavy burden on me as a faculty member, I feel, to try and not misrepresent where things are.

Struggling with the view that truth is partial and incomplete was a common theme among many of the discussions I had with these teachers.

Negotiations between students and knowledge

These feminist teachers often had expectations for the participation of students both in terms of bringing various types of knowledge to the classroom as well as contributing to knowledge negotiating activities during class sessions. In this section, I describe those expectations as well as some of the struggles that occur when teacher expectations are different than those of the students. The areas on which I chose to focus are: creativity and risk-taking, level of commitment/engagement, questioning content, learning from and teaching each other, and challenging and recognizing personal ideologies.

Encouraging creativity and risk-taking

Teachers with whom I spoke encouraged risk-taking and creativity in their classrooms. They saw the classroom as a place for students to try out ideas that eventually may or may not work out in the way that they had hoped or initially intended. One teacher talked about how she promoted this creativity in her students.

> I will encourage students to try out ideas that they have. "Come talk to me about it after you get started. Let's see if it will work or won't work. And if it doesn't work, that's alright. We'll get started again from another position and maybe we can try to get it to work." So there are these kinds of attitudes that I take towards the students and I want them to take--I want them to also be creative and not to be afraid to be creative--not to be afraid that if they ask something, it's a stupid question.

Even when ideas were highly contradictory, teachers encouraged their students to engage with them and talk about them in classes. One teacher related this highly charged incident.

> One white woman, I will never forget, who had the courage to say, "I have been afraid of black men all my life and I always think that they're going to attack me and rape me and this and that." And the class got so angry at her, calling her racist and this and that. And then I said, "Hold it. Don't you dare sit there and tell me that none of you are afraid when you see young black men walking towards you. Everything we see in our culture, particularly in the media, about how gangs are, don't you dare tell me that she's the only one that has ever had this thought." ..."How can you say that in class?" is what they were asking her. And I said, "She can say that in class because I asked her. I asked all of you to say that. To say something like this--so don't take your anger out on her, when in fact, your anger is about the fact that this fear exists and let's talk about it."

These teachers attempted to encourage, acknowledge, and deal with the tensions brought forth by student comments and questions in their classrooms.

Expecting varying levels of commitment/engagement

Teachers expected varying levels of involvement from their students, often depending on various contextual factors. This involvement was expected in a variety of ways--through journaling, participation in class discussions, attendance at class meetings, or through other outside assignments. One teacher discussed how, in one of her smaller classes, she established certain guidelines for participation at the beginning of the course.

> We had certain rules that I set up at the very beginning of the semester. One is that this is a small class and as a small class, everybody is committed to the course. And being committed to the class means...that you're going to be here every time we meet. You are going to be here....You have to be here. You have to take part each class. You have to be part of the discussion in each class.

This level of commitment was generally expected more in the smaller classes. However, more or less, avid student participation in their own learning was seen as important to these teachers.

Encouraging speech

One area of student participation in classes generated much discussion during the conversations that I had with these teachers. This was the question of required (and often evaluated) speech in class sessions. There were several, often conflicting, views on this area.

In larger classes, teachers seemed to encourage speech, but did not mandate it in the large group sessions. Several teachers in both large and small classes made it a policy only to call on students who voluntarily either raised their hand or spoke without being solicited. These teachers asserted the right to student silence within their classes.

On the other hand, several teachers believed that verbal participation in class discussions was crucial to the education that was intended for the class. One teacher described her stance on this issue.

> They also know that they're expected not to be bashful in discussions to get in there. You've read the material. And if you haven't read the material, then don't come. And if you don't come, you get graded down. So you read it and you come and you say what you feel and don't be afraid.

When pressed further on her stance, she explained the rationale behind her philosophy and expectations.

> There were classes I took as a graduate student where I never opened my mouth. And I understand why students don't open their mouths sometimes. And I hope I don't penalize people for not opening their mouths, but what I do do is I try--I mean, the classes that I never spoke in, nobody every tried to get me to speak. Nobody ever tried to figure out, you know, maybe this person is shy. Maybe this person just doesn't feel comfortable or capable in this particular class. And what I try to do is to break down those kind of defenses against not talking.

This teacher hoped to pay attention to reasons for not speaking and yet work within those reasons and subsequent boundaries to encourage verbal participation in her classrooms.

Another teacher explained her intention in trying to encourage speech in the classroom. She noted that the classroom arrangement and her asking students to speak was an acknowledgement of the power relations between herself and the students, and yet she believed it was also an attempt to have people learn to speak in subsequent situations.

> Through the act of that, going around the room again, is in a way, that again that foregrounding of the operating in this situation of unequal power. And I have power to make you speak and demand your speech at this moment. But also,...I fantasize perhaps that if you impose a regularity on it, than it has a different weight too. Some of it is just the rhythm, okay, it's time now. You made me open my mouth which I'm going to be in the habit of....Turning it into not a choice of being able to not hear my voice again.

She emphasized that she attempted to teach a certain responsibility to oneself for speech in the classroom, however. Through this attention to students' own comfort levels, she brings to the forefront yet another aspect of student voice.

> I guess I sort of want to say that in learning to have a little bit of power in this situation where you feel that you have less than you might have eventually is also about learning to protect yourself. It's about learning not to, because you are asked to speak, ...to reveal what you are most vulnerable about. So it's also about learning to not say. So I think that there are very complicated negotiations that must also be used, every time that they open their mouths, about what it was that they were thinking that they aren't going to share with us right now. ... I think that people do choose to say certain kinds of things and if people choose to say them, they get to deal with them.

Another aspect of student voice is the relationship between those who generally speak frequently and those who struggle with speaking in classroom settings. One teacher pointed out the importance of learning to listen to others as well as learning to speak.

> I think that to me, as important as the practice of speaking is, is the practice of hearing which is crucial. So that for those people who are used to and do dominate a classroom because they've been raised in an environment in which their culture or your gender gives them a sense of power and a particular strength-- They feel like they need to or can speak more often that the practice of the ability to listen, the opportunity to listen to what the people who often aren't speaking are saying in other classes, are thinking.

Listening and speaking are two areas that were often problematized during my conversations with these teachers.

Questioning content

Just as students were encouraged to question themselves and their own ideological positions, so too were they expected to examine and challenge those positions represented by the content of the course as well as that of the field in which they are situated. In the words of one teacher,

> Everything we read, the first question is, 'What's the underlying ideological position?' It's not 'just true'. The person is somewhere--has some perspective--believes something. ... The person who wrote this has some theoretical notion of why things work the way they do.

Teachers realized that this is sometimes difficult, though, for students who are not used to examining the underlying assumptions of a given piece of work with which they are asked to engage. One teacher posed the difficulty in this way,

> I guess that is one of my goals--that people are taking on different positions, looking from different positions at the work. It's very hard to do for (the people who take my classes) --it seems alien...(We) live out our experiences. And those experiences don't foster taking multiple positions and interrogating.

This concern was expressed many times as teachers struggled with trying to encourage their students to feel competent in engaging critically with class material. Another teacher voiced the experience in her classroom,

> It takes awhile to get students going to the point where they feel enabled in the discussion. But eventually, to varying degrees of success, we get there and the class becomes increasingly engaged. And I always know that it has really taken off when one of the students get outraged about something. 'This is really bad! Who funded this anyway?' And I realize that they feel that they're entitled to criticize.

This teacher stated further, "So the challenge of the course is getting them to recognize that yeah, they have a lot to say about it. And that they're perfectly capable of understanding and, in fact, it's politically important that they understand." These teachers thought it very important that students learned and assumed the role of critical analysts when presented with content both inside and outside of the classroom.

Learning from and teaching each other

Another theme throughout this work was that which emphasized the responsibility of students to learn from and teach one another. An underlying belief of this expectation was that students were competent and had valuable insights and experiences that could contribute to discussions within the classroom environment. One teacher expressed her thoughts about the value of students' input in the following way as well as a strategy that she used to encourage such participation.

> I think they start to value what they know because they have a large chance to share what they know with other people--not just with me...In (one) course I teach, I set it up exclusively so that they have to teach each other in a lot of different situations. Like I set the syllabus up so that not everyone reads the same thing and they need to teach each other about things. All on the same topic or different perspectives on the same topic. One, because they can't possibly read everything they need to read professionally so this is a chance for them to learn from colleagues. But also because I think they get a lot out of talking about different perspectives and using somebody else's ideas with your ideas.

Another teacher expressed her strategy to get students to talk with and learn from one another. In describing what she says to her students, she commented,

> I have studied this longer than you but at the same time your experiences seem radically important to how you understand it. And also I believe that you have a lot to learn from your neighbor, that you might never even believe. So I think that it's really important for you to...talk to your neighbor almost every day.

Finally, another teacher talks about one of her primary goals as trying, "to set up a situation where they take each other seriously as producers of knowledge."

These attempts to encourage teaching and learning among students as well as through course content and participation of the teacher were not always accepted easily by students in these courses, however. Oftentimes, students wanted to hear from the presumed authority in the class--the teacher. Several teachers commented on their struggles as they attempted to get students to look at their peers as authority figures in these classes. One teacher told her students,

> I want to hear and everybody else wants to hear what everybody else had to say. I will add to it; I will elaborate on what you say but--you know, I don't want to do that. You are going to have to be just as much a part of this as I am.

Another teacher presented her understanding of the dilemma in this way,

> Often enough if you can set up a class in which you are positive enough about student responses, I would make it clear that (you're) taking students seriously and learning from them, and you're taking that argument seriously. I think you can do it. It's just they're not very much trained to take each other seriously as producers of knowledge. So it's hard to get them not to respond to you and to respond to each other. They tend not to want to engage with each other for lots of different reasons. So beyond setting up artificial situations in which they have to do that, it's very hard to get them to take each other seriously. That's a legacy, I think, of our notion of meritocracy and individualism that just gets brought into a feminist classroom. And with which we all struggle, and I think feminists struggle more because of this notion of collaborative learning and process.

Another teacher told of a situation in her classroom where she had asked students to engage with each other in a group setting.

> A few students complained that they weren't getting very much out of their groups because other people were "stupid" and not contributing anything to their education. They said they didn't pay to hear their fellow classmates--they wanted to hear me. They wanted to hear the Word from the authority. ... So I guess, it can work at times and doesn't work at other times with all kinds of people.

Several teachers expressed their difficulty in trying to get students to accept each other's experience as valuable, even though the teachers themselves recognized it as such.

Getting students to assume the role of competent teachers in the classroom also had its problematic aspects. Teachers said that some students don't see themselves as being able to participate in that capacity in the classroom. Attempts to get class members to recognize the value of both their contributions and those of their peers was an issue with which many teachers struggled.

Challenging and recognizing personal ideologies

A further goal these teachers had for their classrooms was for students to challenge their own ideologies as they grappled with the course content and ideologies which entered into the classroom environment. One teacher explained how she tried to communicate these views to her class.

> When you say that someone is to the right, they're to the right of you. Or to us. It's not like we're objective and we can stand out here and look at them....I think it was a good experience for students to understand that while we're out here putting people on the continuum, we're somewhere too. And ideology is in relation to our ideology. And that's been helpful to students who begin to see that.

Another teacher discussed how important it is for them to challenge their own ideologies rather than have a new ideology imposed on them by the teacher or class content.

> And to challenge their own ideologies rather than, you know, us imposing it from without. One can set up a classroom that will allow students to ask the questions so that it's not imposed. So I talk about the kind of complements of technique and content, you know, if you pose the questions in the right way or if you assign the right kinds of works, then the students are going to be more able to ask their own questions that lead you to the kind of productive discussions you might want to have as a feminist. That merely bringing in a perspective from the outside isn't necessarily the way to go with introductory students.

Other teachers tried to get students to examine their own constructedness as it relates to ways of thinking and ideologies and how that relates to class content as well.

> What I try and do is talk about (the topics) in a way that allows them entry into their own constructions. So that they can get curious about 'you know I never thought about it like that before. I wonder how that has like affected me or constructed me' and from there they can sort of like be thinking about their own (identity) and what's happened to them via that.

Teachers often encouraged students to delve into their own ideologies to examine how they were constructed and how they will choose to construct them in the future.

What then is the expected outcome for this examination of students' ideologies? Several teachers commented on what they hoped would happen through this questioning.

> One of the things that I also try to do is to get them to deconstruct a lot of their own beliefs so that they can remain open to a new way of looking at things...what I try to do is get them to take apart all these assumptions about why this is a practice and to look at certain cultural norms and who benefits.

Another teacher put it simply when she expressed the optimal outcome of students questioning their own stances on given topics. In her words, "I think the best that would happen is that people get to think of other ways to look at things. I guess the best thing that would happen is they better respect and understand the role of (others)." Yet another teacher talked about feedback that she has had from students and others who have heard about her classes which indicated the degree to which her class affected students' ways of thinking. In her words,

> I literally know that a lot of people end up thinking of things in a way that they'll never be the same. Now it's not a big deal, and if I'm the only one saying that and there's nothing else happening, that's real different than if other people in their lives are saying the same thing.

These classes don't necessarily change the ways that people think, however. One teacher expressed her disappointment when asked how she feels about those who refuse to challenge their own ways of thinking. When asked how she felt about students who refuse to question their own ideologies, she stated (speaking in terms of white men in a specific situation),

> It's not okay because, you know in fact, how they think and feel and act has real implications for the next generation of the so called 'others.' It makes me feel two ways. One is disappointed but it never really got any further than that. And that they really had the privilege of shaking us all in a way that white women or gay men or others in the course don't. But on the other hand, I feel like at least in the backs of their minds, they will always have this other discourse running. And that if I'm lucky at some crucial point and it will be the decision that they make... They will at least be informed some how.

Teachers reported varying degrees of success at getting people to engage with and challenge their own ideologies as well as those represented by others in the class or in class content.

One teacher posed a specific strategy to get students to acknowledge and claim their own thoughts and underlying ideologies. She discouraged the use of the passive voice and encouraged people to "be responsible" for their expressed viewpoints. She explained,

> I'd just say, "Please be responsible for what you say. I am. Other people are putting themselves out there. And if there's anything that you're going to learn as a scholar, in this classroom, you have to be responsible for what you say and what you think, especially what you say." And I think people really respect that. So that by the end, we end up with people saying some really incredible stuff, but we also have people really engaging each other.

This claiming of responsibility for one's own thoughts and viewpoints allows students themselves and others to engage with and challenge the ideologies that form the basis for their thoughts.

These teachers acknowledged that challenging one's own ideologies was not an easy process, especially when related to the oftentimes personal and controversial nature of the class content. One teacher discussed her understanding of this difficulty.

> Even students who probably aren't aware of how they might be engaging with it, there's some real fundamental questions that we ask that if they're not too busy resisting often do have an impact. It's uncomfortable--we deal with really uncomfortable topics in this course...It's hard for people.

Another teacher talked about how the topics in her class challenged this process as well.

> We talk about how racism and race and gender and class are really loaded issues right now and that there is really no way of discussing this without being aware of the fact that you're going to be emotional about it. That there are no distinctions between this intellectual high ground that we take with the emotional aspects of this stuff.

Class content was a particular challenge as students acknowledged, engaged with and perhaps modified their own assumptions and ideologies. The examination of current ideologies and ways of thinking was discussed as an important theme through many of these interviews.

Negotiations between teacher and knowledge

The teachers in this research often acknowledged their own roles in the production and validation of certain types of knowledge. Here, I focus more narrowly on some of their perspectives on opportunities and challenges as they function in this role and many others related to knowledge negotiations in their classrooms. The areas on which I chose to focus are: learning from students, keeping the dialogue open, and acting as an authority on content.

Learning from students

An important component of teachers' understandings of their roles was that they were open to being questioned by and learning from students. Students were not expected to acquiesce to the knowledge presented or the teachers' perspectives. In fact, oftentimes teachers would not

give their perspectives immediately so that students could form and feel free to express their own views before hearing those of the teacher. Many teachers talked about how much they valued perspectives that students have contributed during their classes. One teacher expressed her appreciation for student contributions in this example.

> If we were talking about (content area), and I had come to a point where I was stumped, I had all these people who knew the answers. And sometimes when we are doing feminist theories, some of the students have had actually more feminist theories courses in humanities than I have. So, I would just say, this is how much I know about feminist theory now what can you add and so on. So it comes during the discussion and I think it's my obligation to structure what the discussion is as I see the important topics in (this area) and to provide what I know about those topics and then go on to what the students can provide in the discussion.

Another teacher stated similar views.

> At the end of the class, I've really had the opportunity to think about my teaching. I think of different ways of teaching. It's a funny thing, though, in (this area). And I think it's sort of a self-feeding thing that goes on because we have excellent graduate students .... and they push us as teachers and they push our research and ask questions of that. So then the work that is done here in terms of teaching and research is different than it would have been. And it's a circle.

Finally, one teacher talked about a specific classroom event which drastically affected the way she conceptualized her field and the work that she wanted to do within it for many subsequent years.

> It was a semester where I learned so much from watching my students listen to that lecture and what they did with it, it has totally changed my life. From that moment on, first of all I couldn't believe that I hadn't seen that it was a key...issue....That's definitely something that I learned from my students. I had never thought about it. It was just watching what happened in their response to (a guest's) lecture and listening to discussion and stuff that made me know that I had to teach in a real different way. I mean, that's the most obvious because it's such a big part of my life now. But until--and I can literally remember the day--until that happened to me, it was a connection I hadn't made.

Many teachers expressed their desire for and appreciation of student input in their courses so that they themselves could learn from students' perspectives. To do this, many recognized that they

had to leave themselves open to being questioned and therefore presented their own work as available for class discussion. As one teacher expressed, she wanted to "make sure that I leave myself open to questioning from them. Trying to get them into my own world and let them open as much as I can."

Keeping the dialogue open

Another aspect of how teachers saw their roles in the classroom was as discussion or dialogue facilitators. They held themselves responsible for keeping the dialogue open and the discussion going. One teacher discussed how she sees her role in terms of student participation in class activities.

> It works. It actually works. It doesn't work because you wish it to work; it works because you sort of watch it and make sure that people are included. And in that class, it's possible to identify somebody who may be having difficulty with something or another and it may be possible to talk to that person, setting up a time to talk, 'What's going on here? What's the problem?' So it means working at it and not just thinking that the teacher's job is to prepare for a lecture and walk in and give the lecture. I don't think that's good teaching.

Another teacher explained her view of this responsibility and how she structured her classroom so that she could fulfill it.

> Sometimes when something is really hard to read, usually in my graduate class, I ask someone to go to the board and write down the questions that come up. In part, I do it because I want to be able to negotiate all the voices participating in the discussion... It's better if somebody else does it so I can keep the conversation going.

Keeping the discussion going and ensuring opportunities for dialogue and participation in class meant to many teachers that they were also responsible for maintaining an environment in which students could feel safe, for remaining silent in certain situations to enable students to take control of class discussion's direction, and for being flexible in providing a class structure.

Creating safe spaces

Creating and maintaining classrooms as safe spaces within which ideas can be troubled is a further aspect that many teachers discussed. They felt it was an important part of their role in the knowledge negotiation process to assure that students felt as safe as possible in that environment to test uncertain ideas and views. One teacher expressed her conviction in this way,

> I want people to be very engaged in what we're doing. I want to make it a very enjoyable experience. I want them to be able to question each other in a way that's not hurtful. I've talked a lot to students who've said that they feel safe to speak in class and in other classes they've taken, it doesn't feel safe. Having one's ideas respected is very important in my teaching.

She said further,

> What I try to create is the sense that I'm co-responsible with the people in the class and their learning. I mean, if they're not learning, it's not, you know, all their responsibility. I have to provide an environment where together we can trouble ideas. I think the environment is really important.

This desire to create and maintain safe spaces within the classroom led to, in one case, to a controversial decision of what was acceptable for inclusion in classroom knowledge negotiations.

> It's my job to, as great an extent as it's possible to my role, to make the classroom as safe a setting as is possible, given that we are still in culture. And that I think separates my teaching out from some...other feminists in that I have certain boundaries that if my class has certain things that I come in and I'd probably say, this classroom is, in addition to teaching video, and some various subject of the class is, this classroom is teaching some kind of progressive notion about culture. And that is that I say racism has no place in this classroom. Sexism has no place in this classroom. And to the extent that if you know that is your deliberate intention, take it elsewhere. To the extent that you fail or do things you didn't intend, we'll work on those things here.

She commented further,

> So I am saying that one, I don't believe in censorship in the world per se. In the classroom, I believe in it very much....And it has to do with thinking of a country that is kind of a hothouse. It's not just the water that helps your flowers grow. It's a hothouse in which you get your flowers grown fast. That means everything is a little more volatile and a little bit heated up and a little bit more in close contact. It means that you can't have noxious fumes to one plant being omitted by the other plant and have them both grow. So you sort of limit what can go on in that particular hothouse in a way that you hope will maximize the growth potential of all the plants that have to be in the room....So it's not going to level the playing field between the men and the women in my class, but it is going to say, this is a place where women that are in this group don't have to look at from their peers the same sense of intimidation that they see in the media every day.

The desire to maintain the classroom as a relatively safe environment, even sometimes with the attempted removal of controversial traits in the larger society, was a goal to which many of the teachers I spoke with aspired.

Remaining silent

One further aspect that teachers saw as one of their roles was remaining silent at crucial times in order to allow students to maintain or achieve a greater control of what and how they are learning in a given situation. Several teachers acknowledged that it was oftentimes helpful for them to remain silent and let students take control of and determine the next course of action for themselves. One teacher put it this way,

> One of the things that I try never to do is to disrupt when students are engaging each other. I try not to disrupt because... Or actually inject anything if I think it's going along well. Because as soon as you say something as a teacher, it sort of brings a dead end to the discussion.

Another teacher talked of a particularly poignant situation in class where two students were challenging each other to expand their viewpoints. She described her participation, or absence thereof, as a teacher in that situation.

> I could actually stand back and sort of watch this engagement happen. So I think it really strengthens me as a teacher to see those kinds of conflicts. There's always the danger that something could get real ugly, but that's the chance I take. I would much rather have had these happening than having them sitting there in their seats taking notes in class.

These teachers felt it appropriate to remain silent during these situations so that students could control the course of discussion.

One teacher talked about how she encouraged students to expect her silence in given situations. She explained it in this way,

> When there's a group of four students sitting together and I'm going to spend 10 minutes sitting with them, I have been physically sitting with them at the same level in the same chairs like they're sitting in. They're free to carry on discussion with each other. They don't look at me to carry on the discussion. They're free to carry on the discussion and free to enter the discussion. They can ask me a question. But again, it levels off--it makes it a more level playing field between them and me. I'm not the person in authority standing up at the head of the class at that moment.

This same teacher commented further that her silence was imperative in certain situations if she were to accomplish the goals of her course. In her words, "I want to help people to learn how to think. But I can't teach them to learn how to think about it if I tell them what they have to think."

Being flexible

A further role some of these teachers chose to assume in their attempts to keep the dialogue open was that which acknowledged that strategies, as well as content, needed to be provisional and flexible. One teacher talked about her approach to this role.

> (Teaching is) like trying out strategies and reproducing some loud experiment that you hope will have a certain kind of result. So I think that unreliably but that you can try certain kinds of things that had some effect in the past as long as you are always provisional about them and always seeing that the circumstances are changing...I think that really the first thing is always understanding that what it's going to produce that is changing.

Factors such as content, students, and the many things affecting classroom dynamics all called for an approach to negotiating knowledge that was tentative and provisional.

Contributing studied understanding of content

Many teachers who I talked with asserted that a very important role they assumed was contributing their studied understanding of the knowledge presented or the content area in which the course was being taught. This understanding, while not excluding the views of students, highlighted their advanced study in the given area. Although there wasn't total agreement on how this should be done, this was a role that often was discussed in our interviews. One teacher talked about her views in this way,

> Well, I guess I think, for better or for worse, it's your knowledge that gets communicated to the students. And I'm not talking about the banking model, because I don't think that's the only thing, but finally I think that students want to know that you're going to teach them something. That you have a certain kind of knowledge--a certain kind of authority based on your study--and your job is to communicate that.

She stated further,

> I think the mistake of some feminist classes I've seen has been to assume that students are going to bring the content of the course with them. And they are going to bring perspectives and different ways of reading that are going to bring conflicts or certain emotions about what they're doing. But finally, you are there to give students something. I still believe in the absolute disciplinary nature of Women's Studies as a discipline, and that it is itself a discipline. It's not just a method. It's not just a politics. It's material that one needs to know. So I think that it's a mistake to think that we aren't supposed to be giving them something that they can work with--an intellectual event, an experience.

Another teacher talked about how the basis of this understanding, and a content area itself, has sometimes been questioned by students. She also discussed the serious potential consequences of this questioning.

> Sometimes students will not recognize or will question what we say that (junior faculty) are giving them a slanted set of facts, that it's not balanced presentation, they don't know what they are talking about....This isn't real scholarship, you know, this is just a bunch of feminist opinions. So I try and help them (junior faculty) build up their sense of authority and say, you know, you don't have to give away everything to be a feminist teacher. You can say I have authority and knowledge in this topic and you've got lots of research to back up these points. Let me tell you about research and so on. So they don't get into these types of authority and that can really get undermining. It's a real bread and butter issue especially on their course evaluations when they are trying to get tenured. So you don't want to get yourself into that kind of situation where students are questioning the very scholarly foundation of the courses you are offering.

Many teachers with whom I spoke hoped and struggled to contribute their studied understanding of the content with which they were engaged as they fulfilled their roles as teachers in these classrooms.

Conclusion

The teachers with whom I spoke in this research resounded some prevalent themes in literature about feminist teaching and expressed their views on others as well. In light of the questions suggested by poststructural theories, I attempted to provide many viewpoints on the types of knowledges that are validated in these classrooms. I also tried to show how these teachers conceptualized both their roles and those of students as they all engage as participants in the classroom and knowledge negotiation process. Finally, I demonstrated the degree to which these teachers problematized the existence of truth within their classrooms and the larger society--a theme that is often considered integral to poststructural philosophies.

This paper seeks to provide another look at the knowledge negotiations that occur within classrooms that are considered to be feminist. While not attempting to provide a definitive guide to what constitutes knowledge within feminist classrooms, I provided insights about how some feminist teachers conceptualize this integral process. The views presented in this paper were by

no means a unified, 'co-constructed' approach to knowledge on feminist teaching. These were my understandings of the ways in which some teachers viewed knowledge negotiation in their classrooms.

As higher education communities around the world grow increasingly diverse, feminist teaching provides options for teachers and administrators as they seek to educate and encourage respectful communities grounded in difference. My exploration into the joining of feminisms and education theories and philosophies has important implications for various reasons. I believe in the necessity of looking at feminism and feminist principles for the possibility of their application in educational settings. While feminist teaching, as broadly defined, is not the panacea for all that ails higher education, its tenets constitute a range of paradigmatic choices that are worthy of examination, so that educators can subsequently determine their merits for individualized situations. I am convinced that feminism has much to offer education. I hope that this work will contribute to the examination of feminist teaching as an educational tool available both for use and interrogation.

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